

Volunteer Van Service for Students Also Available Starting this Friday □

Washington, DC - Thursday, Congressman Harry Teague announced that New Mexico's student veterans eligible for a special emergency payment of their Post-9/11 GI Bill education benefits can now apply online beginning October 2nd. Student veterans can also request courtesy transportation to the VA regional benefits office in Albuquerque.

"New Mexico's veterans have served our country and earned these education benefits. A quality, affordable education will open doors for our veterans and allow them to earn a living when they return home. It is only right that we make it as easy and convenient as possible for our veterans to receive their education benefits," said Congressman Harry Teague. "The Albuquerque VA benefits office is several hours away from most towns in southern New Mexico - today's announcement will allow student veterans to access their benefits without the burden of a trip to Albuquerque."

Many New Mexico veterans who would have had to travel long distances to apply in person at the Albuquerque VA benefits office will now be able to apply online at www.va.gov starting tomorrow, Oct. 2. The online application will guide veterans through the process to supply needed information. The online applicants will receive their emergency payments through the mail after processing. Congressman Teague is also urging the VA to have a representative from the VA regional benefits office deliver checks to veterans throughout the district.

If student veterans need assistance or cannot access a computer they may call one of Congressman Teague's [six district offices](#) at 1-888-9-TEAGUE and his staff will assist them with the process.

Students without their own transportation can also request free van service, provided by volunteers, to carry them to the nearest benefits office. To obtain this service, veterans should call their nearest VA medical center and ask for the "Volunteer Transportation Coordinator." Transportation will be on a first-come, first-served, space-available basis. New Mexico veterans can find a map and list of medical centers at <http://www2.va.gov/directory/guide/state.asp?STA TE=NM>

Whether traveling by personal vehicle or volunteer van, VA officials suggest students check their mail boxes and banking accounts before leaving home, since some veterans will find their checks have already arrived.

The emergency checks are an advance on each student's education benefits, and the amount will be deducted from future benefits payments. Checks will be written at the regional offices for veterans who bring a photo ID and evidence of their enrollment. A \$3,000 payment is the maximum in emergency education benefits, with many veterans receiving smaller payments based upon their likely monthly education benefits.

The most updated information regarding VA issuing emergency checks will be available on the VA's Web site www.va.gov starting October 1st.

Background:

The GI Bill for the 21st Century, which was passed by Congress and signed into law last year, provides a full, four-year college education to any veteran who has served since September 11, 2001 for at least 90 aggregate days or at least 30 days with a disability discharge.

Nationwide, more than 277,000 veterans and their eligible relatives applied for assistance but the VA has fallen far behind in processing payments. Congressman Harry Teague wrote a letter to VA Secretary Shinseki calling for a full accounting, as soon as possible, about the problems the VA is encountering, and what the VA is doing to solve them, as well as any potential problems the VA believes it may encounter.

Last week, the [VA announced](#) that on Friday, Oct. 2, its 57 regional benefits offices will begin providing on-the-spot emergency payments up to \$3,000 to students who have applied for their education benefits but who have not yet received a government payment.

On Monday the 28th, [Congressman Harry Teague met with student veterans at NMSU](#) to learn about their experience with the Post-9/11 GI Bill and to learn about problems they may be having with their benefits.

On Tuesday the 29th, Congressman [Harry Teague wrote a letter to VA Secretary Shinseki](#) urging the development of a plan to deliver Post-9/11 GI Bill emergency education benefits due to southern New Mexico's veterans.